



Norfolk Island

Pacific island destinations continue to bid for Australian travellers' business, with ongoing and new marketing campaigns expected to drive traffic through travel agents' doors.

Marketing campaigns expected to further boost Pacific island demand

By Gary Walsh

THE rising value of the AUD has seen many Australians choose to holiday off-shore, and while the dollar's new supremacy has seen the likes of the US and Europe become significantly more affordable, the islands of the Pacific remain immensely popular.

It's been a tradition for Australians, especially couples and young families, to head to the likes of Fiji, New Caledonia and Vanuatu for short breaks and school holidays. And that continues today: Fiji, for example, has just recorded its best ever September in the Australian market, with more than 30,000 tourist arrivals for the month – the first time any country has supplied Fiji with so many tourists in a given month.

Vanuatu too is recording strong results in the Australian market, with the expectation that numbers will only increase after the launch of the country's first major advertising campaign in this country.

Vanuatu Tourism Office Australian representative Jackie Lau says that 2011 is expected to be a strong year. "Vanuatu has seen a significant

increase in tourist arrivals over the past five years and Australians are increasingly attracted to discover an island destination just three hours from Australia which offers not just incredible natural beauty but also a vibrant and unspoilt Melanesian island culture," she said.

The country had seen a 38 per cent increase in tourism arrivals since 2006, she said, "and while each year is subject to competitive environment and climate impacts of the region such as the recent floods which can impact the figures month-on-month, the overall trend reflects strong growth".

The Pacific generally has grown steadily in the past year, with year-on-year growth of around five per cent overall. New Caledonia was a standout with arrival figures from all countries for October and November increasing by 21 per cent and 23 per cent respectively on the previous year. Papua New Guinea saw increases of 13 per cent for those months on 2009 figures.

Despite Australia's uncomfortable political relationship with Fiji, Australians have flocked to the country in record numbers, and now

represent close to 50 per cent of all tourist arrivals, which were up by more than 16 per cent for the first nine months of 2010 over the previous year. Australians arrivals were up by more than 28 per cent in that period.

The stunning result from the Australian market made it inexplicable that rumours emerged of a closure of Fiji's tourism offices in Australia and New Zealand – rumours that forced Tourism Fiji's newly appointed chairman David Pflieger and CEO Josefa Tuamoto to declare that no offices would shut.

Pflieger said Tuamoto and his team "will stay focused on the key markets of Australia and New Zealand because those two countries are Fiji's first and second most important sources for visitors".

Tuamoto said, "While some adjustments are planned for our marketing spend this year, Australia and New Zealand will continue to receive the lion's share of Fiji's government funded FJD23.5 million (about \$A12.8m) tourism budget. If anything, our key change for 2011 is to place even more emphasis on how and where we will be doing our marketing

activity within Australia and New Zealand, so that we can maximise Fiji's return on investment in this key national industry."

The most recent available figures show that Australia accounts for 15 per cent of arrivals in Samoa. Tourism generally has been slowly recovering from the impact of the September 2009 tsunami that devastated parts of the country's main island, Upolu, and the effects of the Global Financial Crisis. Much of the tourism infrastructure damaged by the tsunami, including some of the country's most significant hotels and resorts, has now been rebuilt, and Samoa is continuing major marketing campaigns to try to bring back the tourists. A new luxury hotel, the 100-room Warwick, scheduled to open this year, will be a welcome addition to accommodation stocks.

Samoa suffered a setback for its tourism industry when Air New Zealand withdrew its direct flight to Apia from Los Angeles after January, citing significant financial losses on the route. As a result, Samoa Tourism said it would work more closely with agents to raise the destination's profile.

Value-for-money a key driver of Pacific business, says Gai

Cook Islands

GAI Fardell of Travelworld Orange is a genuine Pacific expert, having visited Vanuatu six times, Fiji four times, New Caledonia twice, and Samoa, Tahiti and the Cook Islands each once. Some trips have been in the call of duty; others for pleasure.

"I enjoy the entire Pacific," she said. "New Caledonia has the advantage of being Paris on your doorstep and is more sophisticated than the other islands, but then again it is more expensive. I enjoy going here with my husband, as he likes dining out."

Vanuatu is a special favourite – along with two educationals, she has ventured back four times to the country on holiday.

For Fardell, the Cook Islands – and

particularly Aitutaki – remains the most beautiful place in the region, but for a family break she recommends the island of Vanua Levu in Fiji "as it is so laid back and unspoilt". As with Vanuatu, Fiji has drawn her back twice on family holidays.

She said Fiji and Vanuatu were the biggest-selling destinations for her agency, largely because of their affordability, but the Cook Islands and New Caledonia were also popular.

When it comes to selling the Pacific, Fardell says she highlights the accommodation and the activities available, rather than such things as the people, culture, scenery and food, with value-for-money a key driver of business.



Air Vanuatu launches 'super special' from \$496 ex Brisbane

AIR Vanuatu offers competitive fares to its home in Port Vila, with a "super special" priced in at \$496 return from Brisbane, \$535 from Sydney and \$624 from Melbourne including taxes and charges. Flight and accommodation packages can be from \$775 per person (twin share) from Brisbane for five nights, while a "Hot Special" at Le Lagon Resort is on offer at \$1095 ex Sydney including three free nights, breakfast daily, with children under 14 free on a stay, play and eat deal. Similar packages exist ex Brisbane and Melbourne.

Air Vanuatu is a full service airline, so meals, drinks and a generous baggage allowance are included in the ticket price. It is notable for offering the only direct international flights to the beautiful island of Espiritu Santo. Santo is known for its stunning beaches as well as exceptional reef and wreck diving, the highlight being the wreck of the SS *President Coolidge*, a troop transport ship which was sunk by a mine in 1942 just metres off the beach.

Vanuatu is just three-and-a-half flying hours from Sydney, and was recently ranked by Lonely Planet as the happiest place on earth. The main island of Efate has a wide range of hotels and resorts, all of which are easily accessible from the airport.



Drew at the To Sua Ocean Trench

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Availability is limited to selected departure periods. Other terms and conditions apply. All flights operate via Port Moresby.

Vanuatu delivers unforgettable experiences



Air Niugini releases fares from \$194

PAPUA New Guinea's national carrier, Air Niugini, has one-way fares to Port Moresby from \$194 from Cairns under its Nambawan limited special. Fares from Sydney are priced from \$378 one-way and from \$232 ex Brisbane. Flights are daily ex Cairns and Brisbane, and twice weekly from Sydney, and Qantas frequent flyer points can be earned on most fares. Air Niugini's own Destinations frequent flyer program is free to join, and points can be earned when using the services of non-airline partners in PNG.

Air Niugini also has executive lounge access that offers complimentary snacks, internet connections and priority boarding. Executive Club members also have access to partner lounges in Brisbane, Cairns and Sydney, and throughout Asia.

Air Niugini services 20 destinations within PNG, giving clients easy access to some of the nation's key tourism attractions, including the Kokoda Track. Beyond its home-land, it offers services to Nadi, Honiara, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, Manila and Tokyo, giving clients an interesting route into Asia with exciting stopover possibilities.



VANUATU has been ranked sixth on Lonely Planet's list of the Top10 countries 2011 in the annual publication, *Best in Travel*. Lonely Planet's Asia-Pacific travel editor Shawn Low says that Vanuatu made the list for its unrivalled authentic cultural experiences.

"*Best in Travel 2011* is all about providing a year's worth of inspiration to take travellers out of the ordinary and into some unforgettable experiences. Vanuatu really delivers when it comes to interesting things to do," Low said.

Authentic cultural and nature based experiences propelled Vanuatu into the top 10 list, with Vanuatu's strong living traditions, festivals, active volcanoes, "thunderous waterfalls" and "remote villages" highlighted as part of the appeal.

Vanuatu Tourism Office general manager Annie Niatu said the announcement showed that Vanuatu was much more than just a relaxing island destination. "The Lonely Planet recognition gets to the core of what Vanuatu can offer visitors, a unique and authentic experience and as Lonely Planet states a 'mystic vibe' that comes from culture and traditions that are still very much alive."

The main theme of Vanuatu's new brand awareness campaign is adventure travel, with a number of new developments that cater for this market. Lope Lope Adventure Lodge launched the first stage of its upmarket accommodation on the east coast of the island of Espiritu Santo on December 23.

Lope Lope is focused on adventure

activities with its adventure sports company Splash Extreme operating from the resort. Splash Extreme offers quad bikes, horse riding, hobie cat sailing, a variety of towed water sports, kayaks, game fishing, island hopping, sightseeing and paintball. So now there are plenty of ways to explore the magnificent blue waters and coral quays that surround the coast of Espiritu Santo.

New tours are opening in the capital Port Vila, Santo and on the remote volcanic island of Tanna.

Among other options, visitors can now sand board down the edge of Mount Yasur volcano, abseil down the Mele Cascades, cycle around Efate Island and canoe up freshwater rivers to the clear blue swimming holes in Santo.

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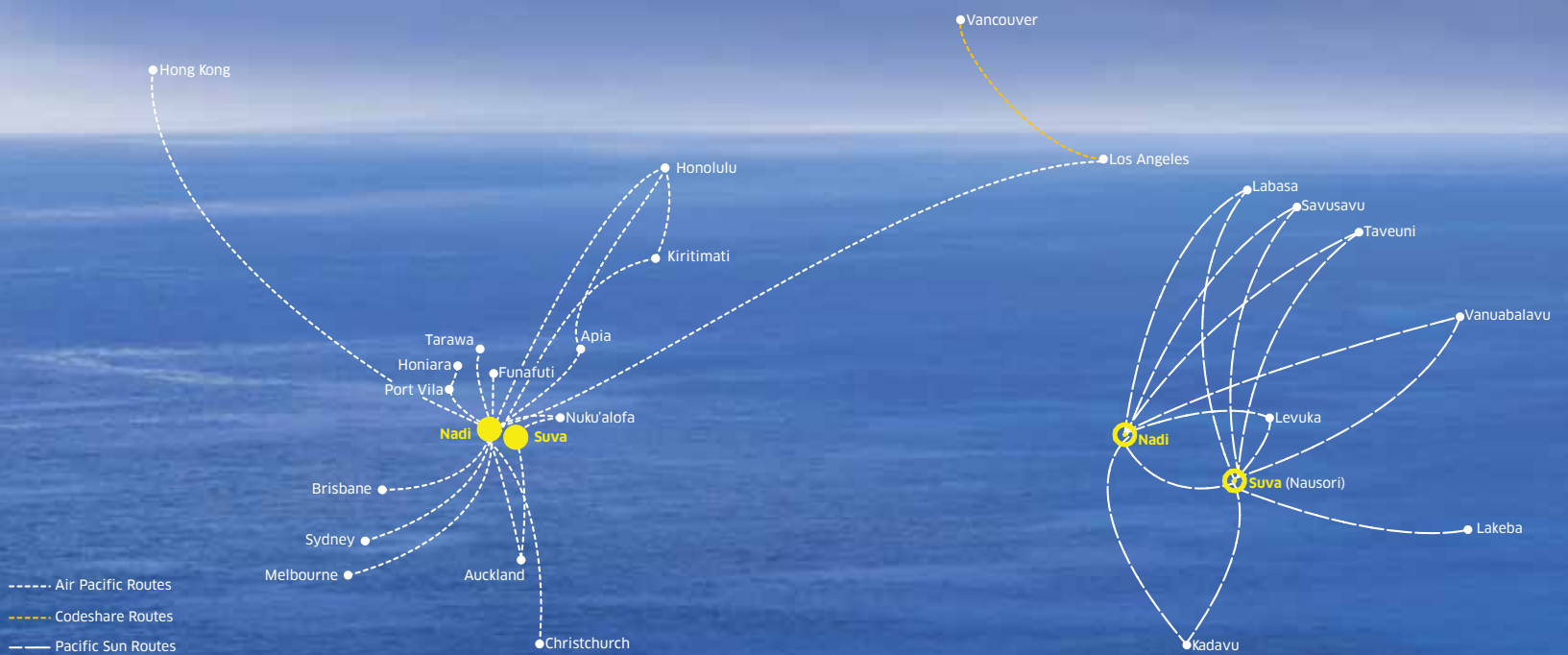
The "Explore the World of Norfolk Self Famil" program: FOC seats and \$99 partner fares (plus taxes, subject to availability) will be available on Norfolk Air as well as great deals on accommodation and activities for qualified travel agents*.



For more information, visit www.theworldofnorfolk.com.au/trades or contact Unique Tourism Collection on 02 9211 6590 or info@uniquetourism.com

* Conditions apply. Extended for travel to 30 September 2011.

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Norfolk Island wholesaler releases package deals

NORFOLK Island wholesaler Norfolk Select has some special deals on the market for sale until May 8. Seven nights in an executive lodge at the Governor's Lodge Resort Hotel costs from \$1399 per person (twin share) ex Brisbane, a package that includes return flights with Norfolk Air, full buffet breakfast daily, car hire and return airport transfers. Prices are from \$1460 from Sydney, \$1525 from Melbourne and \$1435 from Newcastle.

The Governor's Lodge Resort

Hotel features 55 one-bedroom fully serviced lodges. Located amongst 4.9 hectares of landscaped sub-tropical gardens featuring majestic Norfolk Pines, the village setting is designed to provide visitors with tranquility and privacy. Facilities include the signature Bailey's Restaurant and garden marquee café, pool and heated spa, as well as nearby tennis complex and golf and bowling clubs.

The lodge is located just outside the Burnt Pine township, a 15 minute

walk to the shopping area.

There is also a self-contained option at Colony Lodge or Poinciana Cottages, with seven nights in a one-bedroom apartment from \$1080 ex Brisbane. The deal includes Norfolk Air flights, car hire and airport transfers. Prices are from \$1140 ex Sydney, \$1110 ex Newcastle and \$1210 ex Melbourne.

Colony Lodge offers modern one bedroom garden apartments, the two-storey, two bedroom Manor house

or newly re-decorated, modern, two bedroom cottage located an easy stroll or short drive to the main shopping centre. Poinciana Cottages is a peaceful boutique retreat on the edge of town, with valley and mountain views and leafy tropical gardens.

The property was one of the original guest houses on Norfolk Island, and today features five separate cottages, all fully self contained with king size or king single beds and a double sofa bed in the lounge area.

Air Pacific takes out readers' award for South Pacific

AIR Pacific has been named the best airline in the South Pacific in a readers' poll conducted by the influential US magazine *Global Traveler*. Fiji's national carrier joins a select group of airlines also collecting awards in the 2010 survey, including Singapore Airlines for the best airline in the world and Qantas for the best airline in Australia and New Zealand.

Air Pacific's chief executive officer Dave Pflieger said the award was recognition of the airline's efforts to deliver the warm Fijian "bula" spirit in each aspect of its service. It is the third year in succession that the airline has taken out the award.

And Air Pacific has signed an agreement for flights between Nadi and Rarotonga, the capital of the Cook Islands, the first time it has flown to the destination. The three-year commitment will fill a void left by Air New Zealand's departure from the route. Air Pacific's weekly service will also offer connections to its Hong Kong service.

The airline is coming off a successful range of New Year specials in the Australian market that saw children's fares from \$199 return – with the involvement of campaign partners, the deal saw kids flying, staying, eating and drinking for that price. Adult packages were from \$1199 per person (twin share) ex Sydney and \$1299 from Melbourne on the same fly/stay/eat/drink basis.



Image credit: Tourism Fiji

September opening date for Mamanuca islands luxury resort

CONSTRUCTION has begun on the five-star Tadrai Island Resort on the northern side of Mana Island, one of the pristine Mamanuca group in Fiji's tourism belt. There will be five private villas, all with outdoor plunge pools and private decks looking out to the ocean. Villas will be located on a secluded cove with exclusive access to Selena Beach.

A restaurant, bar and freshwater pool will complete the resort, which

is expected to open on September 1, 2011. Villas will feature luxury items such as Bose sound systems, wireless internet and in-room iPads. It will be the Mamanuca's first fully inclusive resort, with guests enjoying three meals daily, and all alcohol and non-alcoholic beverages at no extra charge.

Managing director Aaron McGrath said: "We are very excited to be able to offer clients a new luxury five-star resort in the Mamanuca Islands. We

are particularly excited that we have the first truly all-inclusive product for our customers in this part of Fiji.

"All buildings, fixtures and fittings will be extremely high end and befitting of an international five-star luxury resort. The resort will be targeted towards couples, honeymooners or those wanting to escape to their own private paradise. Guests at Tadrai Island Resort will experience a level of Fijian service

and hospitality not yet seen in the Mamanuca group of islands."

Tadrai Island Resort will be part of the World Resorts of Distinction group. One of the features of the new resort will be legally binding weddings conducted by a Fijian minister or a civil celebrant, so clients' wedding and honeymoon can be held in the same place. The resort will employ its own wedding co-ordinator to facilitate the arrangements.

Vanuatu

so laid back, even the prices are relaxed!



Vanuatu photos courtesy Kirkland photos

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